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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the use of qualitative observation techniques for gathering and analyzing data related to group processes during an Accelerated Schools Model training session. The purposes for this research were to observe the training process in order better to facilitate present continuation and future training, to develop questions for future study, to study hypotheses derived from the literature, and then to relate these findings to the implementation and impact of the Accelerated Schools Model Training. Participants were from 13 schools with 7 collaborative universities; there were 8 observers. Observers were told to observe the process within the groups only and not to become involved in the discussions or to evaluate or judge. The resulting data were divided into eight categories: brainstorming, taking stock, stumbling blocks to group process, perceived problems, proposed suggestions, visualization, making decisions, and timeline. Two case studies are analyzed in detail using these categories. Suggestions for future implementation of the model include: (1) observation of the teams in session; (2) research questions developed a priori by the trainer/facilitator to bring focus to daily observations; (3) collaboration between the trainer/facilitator and the participant observer, which continues through the training on a regular basis; (4) verification of reliability of the observed activities through audio or video recordings to support further interpretive research; and (5) use of emic and etic classification by observers. Finally, the study indicates that the methodology employed has the potential for more effective implementation of training. Specifically, the eight categories forced the trainers/observers to focus upon important dimensions that may illuminate previously unobserved or latent obstacles to effective group activities and interaction. (Contains 12 references.) (ND)

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Using Qualitative Observation to Document Group Processes in Accelerated Schools Training: Techniques and Results

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Abstract

This paper describes the use of qualitative observation techniques for gathering and analyzing data related to group processes during an Accelerated School Model Training Session. The presentation includes a discussion of the roles and tasks of observers and demonstration of techniques for analyzing qualitative data. In addition, results of the qualitative analysis of group processes are presented and discussed in relation to implementation and impact of the model.

Using Qualitative Observation to Document Group Processes in Accelerated Schools Training:Techniques and Results

The Importance of Observation

The importance of the role of observation can first be detected as early as the fourth century B.C. in the Aristotelian role of the observer in constructing reality as opposed to the Platonic concept of the concrete. Guba & Lincoln (1981) bring the advantages of observation up-to-date in modern times:

> The basic methodological arguments for observation, then, may be summarized as these: Observation . . . maximizes the inquirer's ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs, and the like; observation . . . allows the inquirer to see the world as his subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural, ongoing environment; observation . . . provides the inquirer with access to the emotional reactions of the group introspectively--that is, in a real sense it permits the observer to use himself as a data source; and observation . . . allows the observer to build on tacit knowledge [inferred], both his own and that of members of the group. (p. 193)

The role of qualitative observation is important to the documentation of group processes in Accelerated Schools Training.

The goal of the Accelerated School Model (Levin, 1990) training was to implement an entirely new concept and approach to schools. The organizers, besides implementing the concept, wanted to know more about the process within the team work sessions where the generation of the ideas and attitudes occurred. Within these teams, members were being to trained to become leaders of the Accelerated School Model within their own schools. Wittrock (1986) suggested that leadership influences thinking; thinking mediates decisions. The

training Model was designed to initiate information, thoughts, and decisions on Accelerated Schools. The organizers wanted to know if and how the process was occurring. The only way to document such information was to observe this process within the workshop sessions.

In this presentation, we will describe the role and tasks of the participant observer in the Accelerated School Model Training, the literature related to participant observer within the umbrella of interpretive research, the methodology of the observations, and the analysis of the data. What is of particular importance is how through content analysis the categories evolved from within the data on observations. After reliability was established, case studies were developed to show examples of categories. The researchers summarized the conclusions to enhance future trainings. Finally, transferability of the results and implications for future studies were drawn.

Participant Observation/Interpretive Research

The data gleaned from the observations was to show specific structure of occurrences rather than overall distribution and perspectives from the actors in the events. This specific structure was clearly consistent with the interpretive methods espoused by Erickson, Florio, and Bushman (1980). This research addresses the following concerns of interpretive research:

-The "invisibleness of everyday life."
-The need for specific understanding through documentation of concrete details of practice.
-The need to consider the meanings of happenings for the people involved.
-The need for comparative understanding of different social settings.

Erickson (1986, p. 120) states that "the program of interpretive research is to subject to critical scrutiny every assumption about meaning in any setting."

Weber (1978) defined social action as a social relationship which may exist when several people reciprocally adjust their behavior to each other with respect to the meaning in which they assign to such an interaction. This perspective was a focal point of the observation for the Accelerated Schools Model Training, observing processes, interactions, and decision-making which required social action. A basic assumption, here, is that formal and informal social systems operate simultaneously, which means that persons in everyday life interact together in terms of both official and unofficial definitions of status and roles. One can learn new culturally shared meaning through face-to-face interaction, given the unique exigencies of practical action at the moment (Erickson, 1986).

It was the responsibility of the observers to make notations of the activities that might lead to culturally shared meaning and decision-making and to observe what is unique to the the given instance. Bolster (1983) found that such an approach focuses on situated meanings which incorporate the various perspectives and assumes the multiple causation of events. Interestingly enough, Bolster pointed out that unanticipated contingencies potentially illuminate rather than confound understanding. Given the freedom to conduct observations, the researcher can give new life to the ordinary and mundane, and those events which are not included in the pre-determined instruments of observation, can find interesting possibilities for action, reaction, and causation. The researcher can observe pedagogical thoughts, judgments, and decisions which are the essence of the cognitive process (Shavelson, 1983).

Most people are observant and would be able to step into a group and observe the actions and interactions. To become a researcher, however, requires much more than just observation. Fieldwork such as participant observation requires one to make use of the ordinary

skills of observation and reflect in systematic and deliberate ways. This methodology requires special training to develop special skills using comparison and contrast and reflection that all human beings possess (Hymes, 1982). Spradley (1980) describes the participant observer as one with a dual purpose: (1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation. The participant observer is explicitly aware of the complexity of social life. It was with this kind of attentiveness that the researchers approached this task of observation.

The Observation

At the inception of training, there was no framework for the research. The observers were told only to "observe the process within the groups." The participant observers were asked not to become involved in the discussions or to act as a facilitator in solving or resolving questions, not to judge or evaluate, only to observe. This was the role of "interpretive research" which refers to the issues of content, the nature of the socio-cultural environment, and the role that each person plays as an intrinsic member of in the process (Erickson, 1986).

The Methodology of the Observation

The participants at the Accelerated School Model Training were from thirteen schools with seven collaborative universities. The schools and universities had been paired to work together in the implementation of the Model. The training consisted of a four day workshop with two team sessions each day, excluding the final one day session. There were eight observers but only two accepted the challenge to carry the observation to its completion. Seven team sessions were observed by one of the observers, and five by the other. Of the eight teams that participated in the conference, the observers were assigned to only two teams which had either one observer or the other. Fieldnotes were taken in each workshop,

resulting in two case studies. A trainer/facilitator was present at five of the twelve observed training sessions. Each session was preplanned to last from 45 minutes to 90 minutes each, with specific time allocated for each question for discussion.

In an attempt to follow the work of Erickson (1986), the researchers felt that the data should attempt to combine a close analysis of the details of observed behavior with the interpretive meaning of the sessions within the wider social context. The researchers attempted to be rigorous and systematic in investigating the phenomena of the group interactions. The researchers listened, observed, and took copious notes in the respective sessions that they had been assigned. When a group was asked to brainstorm, make lists, or complete an activity that produced an audible or visible expression, all was noted. The observers were now left with the bulk of data that needed to be analyzed and applied to the Accelerated School Model.

Purposes for Research

The evolving purposes for this research were two-fold; The first was to observe the training process in order: (1) better facilitate present continuation and future trainings, (2) to develop research questions for future study, and (3) to empirically study hypotheses derived from the literature. The second purpose was to relate these findings to the implementation and impact of the Accelerated Schools Model Training.

Methodology

This research did not begin with a question; the research began with a directive . . . "Observe and record the processes within the groups." No other guidance was given before the training session began. Confused as to the many interpretations of what "observing processes" might mean, we entered with trepidation as to the expectations of our assignment.

There was very little time to identify areas of interests or research questions within the given directive; therefore, the categories were developed inductively after the research was collected. The analysis did not begin with theories or hypotheses, but instead used inductive reasoning to interpret and analyze data into meaningful categories. Most often in participant observation, categories are not determined a priori but evolve from the data (Erickson, 1986). Such "grounded theory" does not precede data but rather such theory emerges as a consequence of the data.

For the purposes of this study, categories were developed by the "constant comparative method" developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Using this method, coding is directly compared to previous data in the same and different categories as a comparison and contrast analysis that eventually forms the properties of the categories to be classified. Glaser and Strauss, however, go beyond the initial stages of classifying data for the purposes of generating "grounded theory."

In this research study, the following methods were used to classify the data:

1. Observation entries were read, notes were taken, and comparisons and contrasts of these entries were made.
2. Each entry was recorded to be fitted onto individual cards for sorting purposes.
3. A brief summary of the content of each card was noted in the margin and a temporary category assigned.
4. All cards were then grouped and regrouped several times depending on the temporary categories assigned. Throughout this process the similarities and differences of properties became more pronounced. Additional marginal notes were entered on each card for further classifications.
5 Within each classification, properties were listed and definitions formed to "fit" each category. Classifications were defined and redefined as needed.
6. As the categories and definitions became more apparent, a diagram evolved which captured the representation of such categories as they had emerged.

7. The entries were read by one observer while the second observer made decisions as to which category made the "best fit."
8. The observers once more reviewed the categories before sharing them with a trainer facilitator who was part of the Accelerated Schools Training.

When the observers determined the categories of "best fit" in step seven, discussions followed after each category was selected for the data. After careful review, the two participant observers were able to come to an agreement of the categories with a reliability factor of 91%. A third member of the training session (the training facilitator) who was not a participant observer was present and checked categories for reliability.

The length and nature of the observations was confined to what the observer could record on the group process whether it be a phrase, a list of ideas, a simple sentence, or a paragraph so as to allow the entire entry to stand on its own. In some cases the observer recorded the exact words of the members in which the data is viewed from the inside (emic perceptive); in other cases, the observer wrote down the data as was perceived from the outside (etic perspective). Etic entries included any interpretation of the team by the observer. Often such entries would include a summary of group discussions, a list of perceived problems, and a notation of which members participated and which did not. Emic entries recorded the exact words of team members. On two occasions, one researcher asked members at the end of the session to summarize what had happened. Exact responses were recorded. The terms etic and emic (Harris, 1968) have been borrowed from anthropology (Harris, 1968) and from linguistics though they are equally relevant today within the studies of education.

Categories of Collected Data

Brainstorming: Involves the group generating new ideas without regard to criticism. A list is often created by having group members shout out ideas. Brainstorming is often a prelude to many other activities in the process, such as visualization and decision-making.

Example 1 When the group of four from School A (a middle school located in Weatherford, Texas) was asked on the second day of the training how they could begin to take stock of their school, they responded:

nurse reports
surveys of opinions
attendance reports
achievement scores
teacher attendance
grading techniques
student attendance
awards

extending awards to community
parent involvement -- taking stock
band/art/gifted & talented programs

Example 2 On the fourth day, the eleven member team from School B (a middle school in Lubbock, Texas) created a list of hypotheses on "why there is little to no family involvement" within their school. They identified the following reasons:

We've said too many years, we're not interested.
Talked down to parents.
Mismatch of cultures.
Economic gap between school and family.
Lack of transportation.
Lack of child care.
Language barriers.
Need to address the whole community.
Importance of communications

Taking Stock: Involves an inventory of any facet of the school. Topics may include students, teachers, administration, community and family involvement, curriculum, instructional strategies, textbocks and other materials, and programs. Perhaps, "taking stock" addresses the question, "What have we accomplished thus far?"

Example 1 School A was asked on the first day of training what evidence do they have that demonstrates unity of purpose. They responded with the following list:

teams	training in learning styles
interdisciplinary units	campus improvement plan
cooperative learning	common discipline goals
goals in general	MET training

Example 2 During a discussion of goal planning on the third day of the training, BF, the principal of School B, realized that many changes already have been in progress and gave examples:

> "We already have in place cooperative learning and academic teams." (Five minute discussion ensues on whether the group has taken stock or not.)

Stumbling Blocks to Group Process: Involves any problem that hinders the group process during the training session.

Example 1 School A struggled for five minutes on the meaning of the following question during the organization session on day two, "Given these hall marks of accelerated curriculum and instruction, how can we organize our school to make accelerated learning happen?

Example 2 The university representative of School A tried to keep quiet during the first two days of training so as not to force his "university views" stating, "It is difficult . . . I have to make a lot of assumptions; I am not as helpful as I would like to be."

Perceived Problems: Focuses on problem areas in the workplace that are perceived as impeding the process of incorporating the accelerated schools model.

Example 1 Discussion continued on day three of "taking stock" with School B. One member is concerned with the "problem with teachers who have been suppressed so long [and] how to get [such teachers] used to empowerment." Others agreed.

Example 2 During the same discussion on day three of "taking stock" with the School B team, two other problems are identified. The first involved how to introduce accelerated schools. One member pointed out that "Too many things have already been crammed on teachers."

Within the same team, the problem of how to get parents involved when too often "teachers dominate parents' voices" generated discussion.

Proposed Suggestions: Involves a preliminary step in making decisions. Often suggestions involve an extended discussion of such ideas

Example 1 BF, the principal of School B, offered the following suggestions during day three of the "taking stock" discussion, "We could pass on information about teacher empowerment through the informal communication channels."

Example 2 Another suggestion that came out of the same discussion, "We need to build up a room with research articles."

Example 3 A third suggestion offered from the same discussion involved implementation. One member pointed out that "The Campus Improvement Plan into central headquarters with timeline needs to be redefined; currently it is due by the end of September." Discussion followed.

Visualization: Requires identifying a vision of the school in the future in regard to any aspect of the acceleration school approach.

Example One member of the School B team commented when asked where do we plan to be in a year, "Hope [name withheld] has come together to solve problems. I see them, the room, [the students] sitting on the floor, how tables are set-up."

Making Decisions: Involves the team unanimously agreeing to put into action some facet of the accelerated schools process.

Example 1 By the third day, session one, on "taking stock," the School B team agreed that they wanted to get the trainer and her teachers to do a training this year at [name withheld].

Example 2 School B decided unanimously to expect "a shared vision" statement by whole school.

Timeline: Helps to initiate one of the preliminary steps in implementation that draws team closer to a vision statement.

Example School B decided to begin the first stage of the process of accelerated schools from August to May. The team agreed that a "vision" statement will be written by May of 1992 in which the "vision must be supported by the total school community."

Ongoing Category

Need for Definition : Involves clarification of purposes for the group to develop a common understanding about a concept or an idea.

Example 1 On day two, the School A team struggled with the need to define the role of the university within the training teams. At one point the university member stated that the "university's role is to facilitate what schools need."

Example 2 The School B team, on day three, halted discussions several time to go back and assess the similarities and differences among the various outcome-based schools on the blackboard. It was decided after many definitions that the team was wasting too much time on the differences between outcome-based and site-based management, accelerated, restructured, and effective schools. The discussion then returned to the agenda questions.

Examples of Categories in Two Case Studies

The Case Study of School A

Background

School A represented a team of four members at the Accelerated School Training Session. Three members were from School A and the last member was faculty at a nearby state university. Another university member who had been expected could not make the training. This four member group was the smallest in the Accelerated Schools Training Session during August of 1991.

School A is located near the downtown area of Weatherford, Texas, a community of 14,000 which houses industries such as oil field equipment, silicone, and plastic products. The school enrolls approximately nine hundred fifth and sixth grade students with a percentage of daily attendance at a high 98 percent. The principal, JW, describes the socioeconomic status of the students as essentially "middle class." Only 13 % of all student qualify for free lunch; whereas, 27 % are on reduced lunch. The student population is described as "stationary [with] very little turnover."

School A's teacher-student ratio has been estimated as one teacher to 29 students. The teachers number 47 of which 20 teach on the fifth grade level and 27 teach sixth grade. Special programs emphasize gifted and talented, content mastery, and Chapter I. The school owns 40 computers; however, the exact usage and location of the computers is not known to this researcher.

Within community involvement, JW reports that there are 37 parent volunteers who come in to work in the school. The school purports there is no business involvement with the school.

The Training

Day I, Session II: Observations of the training began on day one, session two in which the School A team focussed on "unity of purpose. Roles of recorder, timer, and facilitator were passed out quickly since session was scheduled for only 55 minutes. Four members were present, three members from School A and one member from the nearby state university. The three members from School A equally participated in lively discussions. It became evident that they had worked together on teams for years. The university member on the team restrained himself from making comments stating that he did not want "to force his university views."

The first guiding question was presented by the facilitator, "What evidence do you have that demonstrates unity of purpose at your school?" The group automatically launched into **brainstorming** while the recorder wrote the following responses on an oversized piece of white paper for all to see:

teams	training in learning styles
interdisciplinary units	campus improvement plan
common discipline goals	cooperative learning
goals in general	MET training

The team moved quickly into the second question, "Can you think of specific examples when groups were working at cross-purposes?" After some discussion in which the three members were **taking stock**, they decide on three examples of cross-purposes that were already in effect at School A: ". . . teaming, more continuity, and the gifted and talented program." Discussion soon ended after the team arrived at their inventory list.

The remaining questions asked the team to discuss, "Where are you right now in achieving unity of purpose? What obstacles do you face in achieving unity of purpose?" After a limited discussion, the three

members from School A arrived quickly in what would be categorized as **definition**, "We recognize our unity of purpose -- to bring students up to grade level." This definitive statement was then written on paper to share with other teams during the large group sessions.

Listing obstacles "in achieving unity of purpose" resulted in some quick brainstorming as time was running out, ". . . time, feeling overwhelmed, how to implement accelerated schools, and content mastery." The generated list of obstacles was left for discussion at another time.

Day 2, Session I: In this session, the main task of the team centered on "organizing an accelerated school." The session lasted 70 minutes, and all members were present. JW, the principal of School A, volunteered to be the facilitator.

The first question during this session became a **stumbling block** that threw the team off for five minutes, thus thwarting the group process. The original question read, "Given these hallmarks of accelerated curriculum and instruction, how can we organize our school to make accelerated learning happen?" The group was forced to change the question to, "How can we organize our school to make accelerated learning happen?" The group, after getting a difficult start, began to **brainstorm** several ideas that included:

Each team can facilitate.
Brainstorm by enlarging on ideas (buddy system)
Lunch hour resolutions.
Cross-grade sharing.

Other ideas were enlarged, "Content Mastery needs to be accelerated versus remediated." After brainstorming, the team **proposed a suggestion** that "staff development [is needed] in accelerated learning." A final decision, however, was not made at this time.

Several comments indicated that the team was **taking stock** through much of the discussion of organizing an accelerated school. Comments echoed several times such as, "We are already doing so much of accelerated learning already at [name withheld]." Another statement which received much agreement, "We need to build the security with the staff that we are already doing so much of accelerated learning; then we need to refine."

At the end of the session, the participant observer asked if the team could sum-up what they had learned during this session on organization. One teacher stated, "Our team process has already been in place for four years." Everyone agreed. The university member stated, "It is difficult . . . I have to make a lot of assumptions; I am not as helpful as I would like to be." This stumbling block continued during the duration of the training.

Day 2, Session 2: This 60 minute session was entitled, "Taking Stock in Role Alike Teams." ML, the university member of the team, facilitated. The first task of the team was to answer, "What questions should be asked for the area?" An immediate **stumbling block** followed in which the group could not figure out what "area" meant. ML, the facilitator, turned the question around to, "How do you take stock?" The group proceeded to **take stock** by developing the following list that was recorded for all to see:

nurse reports
surveys of opinions
attendance reports
achievement scores
teacher attendance
grading techniques
student attendance
awards

extending awards to community
parent involvement -- taking stock
partners in education
band/art/gifted & talented programs

Begin to tie together 'critical areas' -- tying sickness together with physical education to curriculum.

The session ended with one member **taking stock** by stating that the school has programs that already exist that are examples of accelerated learning, "art/language arts."

In this session, all members were participating perhaps because ML, the university member, was facilitating. A list of areas was created in which to take stock and several **proposed suggestions** were discussed such as a "parent night" and "math night."

When the participant observer asked the group to summarize what they learned, several very different statements were made, "It is good to point out that band and art need to be assessed. . . . We picked up a lot of good ideas from Suzanne." ML concluded, "I can look at it [the process] more objectively."

Day 3: Session 1 The third day involved "Taking Stock and Goal Planning." All members were present. A facilitator did not seem to be necessary for this 60 minute session.

The team stated several times during the course of the discussion that they felt very comfortable with their involvement with parents and the commitment and professionalism of their teachers and administrators. The activity of **taking stock** of their strengths gave the School A team much positive reinforcement. They developed the following list:

Professional teachers -- supportive of each other.
Lots of artistic skills that could be shared.
Some parental involvement.
Community involvement -- business partners
Artistic program
Willingness of teachers to accept ownership
Commitment of principal to allow teachers' freedom -- Empowerment
Interclass working arrangement of grade level teachers
Multicultural environment
Content area reading
Reading-across-the-curriculum

A **proposed suggestion** that arose was to have a "send off celebration" to launch the accelerated school program at School A. A second **proposed suggestion** involved the need to consider problems within the physical environment of the school." All members agreed without discussion.

This session generated a lot of excitement in **taking stock.** The participants felt an ownership and pride in the system already in place and with the exception of one member, were excited about the long-term possibilities. As they continued with the brainstorming, they capitalized on the ideas they already had, and fueled each other for the future.

Attempting a timeline, however, created problems. The members of the group felt that they needed to do some more work and studying in order to make any definitive decisions. One doubter suggested that perhaps the team should consider putting a timeline in place next year after more careful planning and preparation.

ML, the university personnel, interjected few questions during this session, yet helped other members realize the strengths that they already have at School A.

Conclusions

It was quickly observed that the team remarked that they have already begun restructuring their school four years ago and spent much of their time comparing the accelerated school model with what they have already accomplished at School A. The only university personnel on the team held back most of the time with his comments because he could not find his role to play in the restructuring process. The other three representatives were more active during discussion. It appeared that the team wanted to figure out ways to make their well geared school function even better, but the group remained rather uninvolved in the process of the training.

No "conflicts" during the training were observed at any time. Nor was a commitment to the accelerated school concept ever observed.

The Case Study of School B

Background

School B consisted of a nine member team during the Accelerated School Training Session. Three members represented the staff at School A, three worked for the Lubbock ISD, and the last three members were faculty at a nearby research university in Lubbock.

School B is located in the Northwest section of Lubbock, a city of approximately 200,000 inhabitants, in Northwest Texas. Lubbock is an important city in the South Plains with an economy based on industry, technology, oil, agriculture, and warehousing. The Northwest section of the city was built 29 years ago, though the expansion and growth in the last ten years has developed in the Southwest side of Lubbock.

School B enrolls 447 middle school students of eighth and ninth grades with a percentage of daily attendance at 96.5 %. The principal, BF, describes the socioeconomic status of the students as essentially "middle class," though the background of the students "range from families on welfare to homes of doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs." Approximately, 28.9 % of the students are on "free lunch" programs. The mobility of the students is 16.2 %, yearly.

The teacher-student ratio at School B has been estimated as one teacher to 15 students. The teachers number 33 of which 15 teach on the eighth grade level and 15 on the ninth grade, leaving three teachers for specializations.

Within community involvement, BF reports that there is minimal parent volunteers; however, eight businesses are participating in the

"adopt-a-school" program. The school owns 60 computers; however, the exact usage and location of the computers is not known to this researcher at this time.

The Training

Day I, Session I: Observations of the training began on day one, session one in which a recorder took notes on the positive characteristics that students, parents, staff, and university facilitators bring to a learning environment. Seven members of the team shouted out answers while two members watched. This **brainstorming** activity generated six oversized pages of ideas from the group. The following is a sample of only one list of positive characteristics of students:

curious	enthusiastic	loyal
unique experiences	unique personalities	eager to learn
lean by doing	bring language	bring a culture
working with others	eager to belong	work together
varied learning styles	hungry for learning	talented
respect authority	respect one another	happy
interested in others	work hard	

Day 3: Session 1 In this 60 minute session of "taking stock" and "goal planning" for the following year, all nine members were present. CS, a dean of education at a nearby research university, facilitated the meeting. The first question was posed to the group, "Where do we plan on being in a year?" BF, the principal of School B, immediately offered her **visualization**, "Hope [name withheld] has come together to solve problems. I see them [the students] sitting on the floor, the room, the tables set-up." (BF was the only member to offer **visualization** at this point.)

The discussion veered to another member who **perceived a problem** with school/university collaboration, "How will [name withheld] get in touch with the university?" Instantly, the answer

to such a question began with a **brainstorming** session which raised more conflicts than decisions:

> BF, the principal, wants a list of special areas of interest.
> Graduate students could collect a data list for the school on special interests of each of the faculty.
> BS, the dean, does not want such a list created.
> Another member wants the university staff to meet the school's staff.

Leaving the question of school/university collaboration behind, discussion turned to the topic of **timelines**. One member felt the first stage of "taking stock" and "visualization" should happen from August to May. Another thought that the "vision" statement could be expected by May. BF, the principal, reminded the group that "vision must be supported by the entire school community." The philosopher of the group reinforced the notion that "part of vision required organized abandonment."

Temporarily, the timeline was left behind for a discussion on changes. BF realized that many changes in her school are already in progress and gives examples. The group then proceeded to **take stock** by stating, "We already have in place 'cooperative learning' and 'academic teams." This same discussion returned throughout the sessions. Often the **need for definition** entered discussions when the team would step back to review the similarities and differences among the various outcome-based schools on the blackboard for all to see. It was decided by the group that these are just terms, i.e., "outcome based, site-based management, effective, accelerated and restructured schools." The members then worked through the idea that "the label isn't the important thing, but the outcome is." Others pointed to the fact that what is important is "that the emphasis is on the process." Discussion continued on whether School B "has goal and visions beyond outcome based learning." The group looped around and back to **taking stock** once more.

During one set back, several members spent considerable time trying to convince the "Doubting Thomas" of the group that, "We have been doing all five of these labels [all along." The ten minutes devoted to this one member became a **stumbling block** that hindered the group process during the training. The discussion spread to the subject of skeptical teachers. Another **perceived problem** that surfaced often was what to do with the "problem of teachers who have been suppressed so long. . . .How [will such teachers] get used to empowerment." No ideas were generated at this time.

Several **proposed suggestions** were offered through the remainder of the discussion. BF stated that, "We are coming back to mission/aims/goals, and we don't need to mention 'accelerated schools." This suggestion was to address the exhausted teachers who feel like they have been through too many changes already. Another member proposed that, "We could pass out information about teacher empowerment through informal communication channels. Words need to be spread by teachers." Someone else suggested, "Back to what to call the restructuring -- Don't call it anything." A fourth suggestion was "to build up a room with research articles for teachers." Finally, the discussion terminated when one member pointed out that "the campus improvement plan into central headquarters with timeline needs to be redefined; currently it is due by the end of September." The group decided then that this plan may be a good avenue to get some ideas off and running.

The researcher observed that the group did indeed "take stock" and **made a decision** to involve one of the trainers and her teachers to conduct workshops in Accelerated Schools Training the following school year at School B.

Day 4: Session 1 All nine members were present in this 60 minute session on "defining roles." In the beginning much time was wasted in establishing a facilitator and in understanding the first questions, "How will this team work together? What will the role be for each of

us?" Such **stumbling blocks** forfeited ten minutes of the group's time.

A discussion on **definition** precipitated on the first question in which all agreed that "each person must define their role individually before working together." Comments were added such as "no bandage solutions" . . . "have to have a win-win situation for everyone." Discussion then changed to whether to involve a total role or approach, not individual roles.

Discussion digressed several times during the remaining minutes. The group first discussed the meeting that was coming up at the nearby research university. The three university faculty did not know if they should bring up accelerated schools. This **perceived problem** was dismissed when members agreed that they should proceed with caution. This temporary decision was agreeable to all three university members. A second digression again involved the **definition** of accelerated schools versus effective schools. No definitions were conclusive.

A second **perceived problem** was how to introduce accelerated schools to the rest of the staff at School B. As one member spoke, "to many thing have already been crammed on teachers." No decisions were made at this time.

Although no decisions were made, many group members **proposed suggestions** on the planning of future staff meetings. Questions were raised such as, "Should we begin meeting for open discussion with other teachers on the staff?" . . . "Should we have mandatory meetings?" . . . "When?" . . . "Early in the morning?" No decisions were reached, but it was observed that the suggestions began to generate excitement that was close to a confirmation.

Finally the researcher observed that only five out of twelve people contributed to discussion. The facilitator never took the an active role. When the researcher then asked the group at the end what

they had accomplished, two members stated, "We were taking stock of ourselves through out own dialogue." . . . "We were continuing the role of the university to try to link up." No one disputed the remarks.

Day 4: Session 2 This 45 minute group focussed on "visualizing" and was the last small group session of the training with all nine members present. The session began with an investigation on "reasons for lack of family involvement." The group facilitator was quickly chosen and recorder listed the efforts of the group's brainstorming on the blackboard:

Talk to PTA
Survey parents.
Get everybody involved
Suggest that each teacher visit three parents each.
Read literature on parent involvement.
Talk to employers.
Schedule parent conferencing.
Contact other districts who have good programs for parents.
Stress the importance of home visits.

Discussion moved to how to get parents involved without teachers dominating parents' voices. More examples were given of the importance of home visits with use of social workers. This **perceived problem** had surfaced many times.

The second question on the agenda asked the group to "generate hypotheses as to why family involvement challenge exists." The group again used **brainstorming** techniques. The following list was created:

We've said too many years that we're not interested in parents.
Talked down to parents.
Mismatch of cultures, i.e., economic gap between school and family.
Lack of transportation

Lack of child care
Language barriers
Need to address the whole community.
Importance of communications.

During this brainstorming activity one of the members of the group stated that, "Hispanics do not value education." A heated debate arose since many of the group members appeared to be offended, particularly two Mexican-American female members. The debate became a **stumbling block** in that the arguments took up the rest of the group time.

Conclusions

It was observed that School B went through the process of the training. The process was not linear for the group in which one stage followed another. The process was messy, difficult to record, and zigzagged in efforts towards a commitment of Accelerated School philosophy and systematic process. Along the path towards commitment was much evidence of conflict, disruptions, need to continuously redefine, moving one step forward and sometimes two steps backwards. Yet the observers witnessed a group that was intimately involved with the process and all the conflict, redefinition, disruptions were needed to get to the commitment of Accelerated Schools.

Relation to Implementation and Impact of the Model

The interpretive research approach can be implemented into the Accelerated School Model Training. The subsequent results will give trainers a clearer picture of the processes that occur within the groups and provide continual support to appropriate effective changes to be implemented on a continual basis throughout the training. These changes will only enhance the training as it progresses. Suggestions as to future implementation would be as follows:

1. There is a strong need for observation of the teams in session, and participant observation would yield the most insightful information for adaptation of the materials, methods, and pertinent advice to solve possible problem areas within the impact of the Accelerated School Model.

2. The trainer/facilitator needs to develop research question a priori bring focus to the daily observations.

3. There is a need for collaboration between the trainer/facilitator and the participant observer. This should begin before the Accelerated School Training course. The trainer should relate to the observer, any particular concerns or interests to be studied. The observers found that limited participation was at best, difficult; therefore, the trainer should decide with the observers, the amount of involvement that is desirable during the observations.

4. The collaboration should continue through the training by means of periodic debriefing sessions on a regular basis. This may be scheduled to occur at the conclusion of the day's activities. While the notes are still "fresh," the participant observers will begin to see additional research questions that need to be observed. The collaboration will thus continue with the trainer/facilitator and the observers to address the evolving questions and reassess the research on a daily basis.

5. To further support the interpretive research, there should be some verification of reliability of the observed activities through audio or video recordings.

6. The observers should take every opportunity to use emic and etic classification.

Transferability

Interpretive research involving participant observer, properly trained and prepared, addresses issues of content. Particularly, the following three features of interpretive research (Erickson, 1986) have a great deal to say about substantive concerns in projects such

as the Accelerated School Project: (1) to speak of the nature of groups as socially and culturally organized environments for decision-making and learning, (2) to look at the nature of leading/teaching as one aspect of a reflexive learning environment, (3) and to reflect on the nature of the meaning and process involved of each person. Such features make this interpretive research methodology not only transferable, but highly desirable in considering processes in effecting change. There are some specific projects that are looking at effective teaching and effective change, that would benefit from the findings and theory that emerged from careful participant observation. These projects might include, but certainly are not limited to, The Goodlad Project, the Middle School Project (currently underway at Texas A & M University), and Project 2000.

This study indicates that the methodology employed has the utility for more effective implementation of training. Specifically, the eight categories that emerged from the data forced the trainers/observers to focus upon important dimensions that may illuminate previously unobserved or latent obstacles to effective group activities and interaction. The exclusion of certain forms of discourse, such as "stumbling blocks" of the group can be noted and corrected.

Implications for Future Studies

The implications clearly relate to the evolution and definition of process. Process is considered an ongoing activity and can be examined metaphorically from several aspects: as an onion with multiple layers that peel off to arrive at the "heart" of the matter, or as on orbital arrangement, where various factors surround, orbit, and influence the central concept. As a result of this research, the process can be metaphorically compared to a molecule: a configuration of nuclei bound together by electrostatic and electromagnetic forces. These nuclei (such as the previously identified categories) are bound together and are yet separate, each

exerting influence on the others, an ever-moving, ever changing entity. Using this as a starting point, participant observation can address the research questions, knowing well that various forces will be pushing, pulling, changing, and mobilizing the search for meaning.

The following research questions may help to frame future studies:

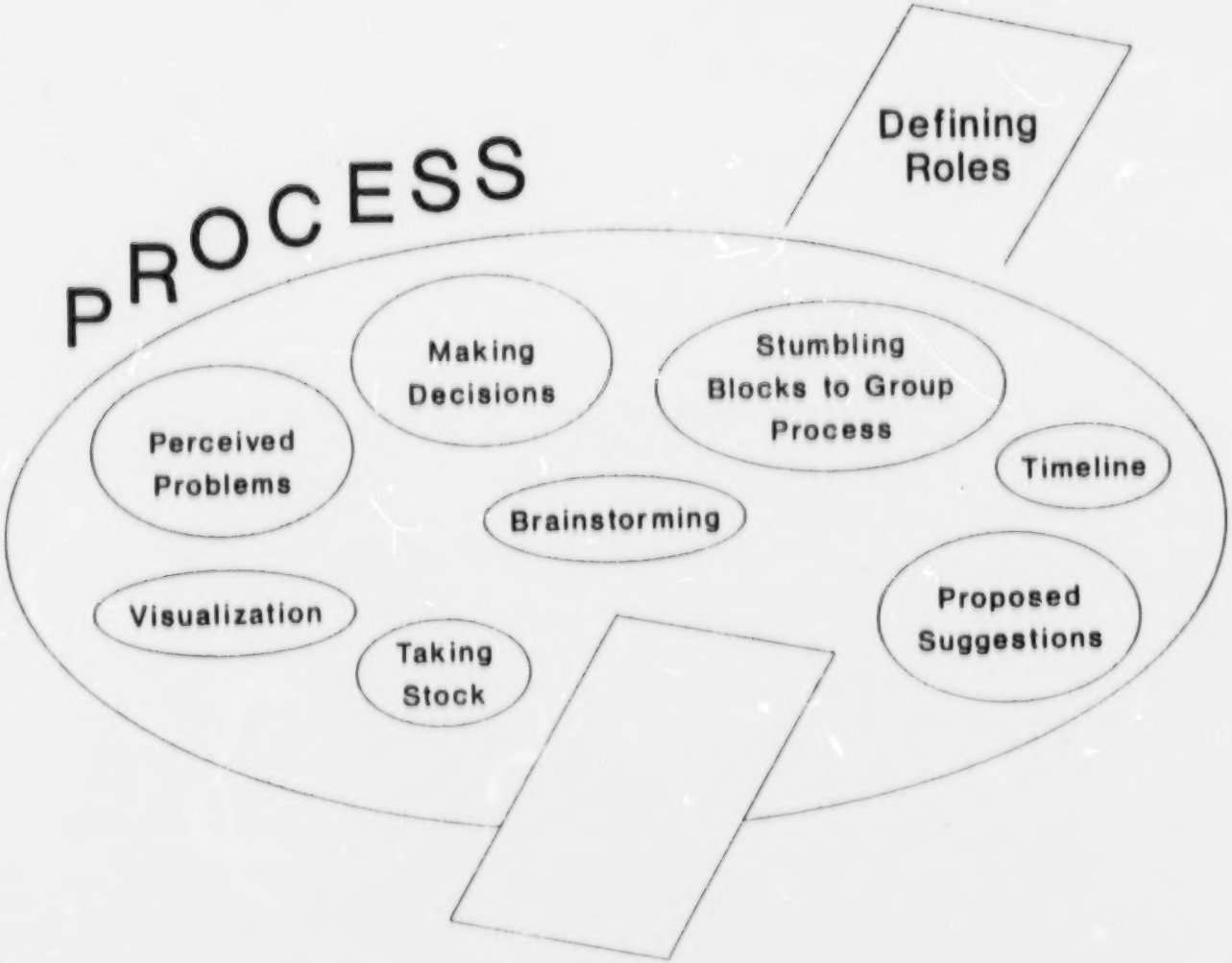
1. Do some categories appear with the Accelerated School Training Sessions more than others? Do some categories appear less than others? Are all categories necessary to go through for the process of the training?

2. Must groups in training go through the whole process that has been identified? Can some groups in training skip parts of the process and still arrive at a commitment to the Model?

3. Does the make-up or construction of the group influence the different categories shown in the findings of this research?

4. Does the make-up or construction of the group influence the commitment to accelerated learning?

5. Is it best to do the training among equals or in highly stratified groups?


PROCESS
Defining Roles
Making Decisions
Stumbling Blocks to Group Process
Perceived Problems
Timeline
Brainstorming
Visualization
Proposed Suggestions
Taking Stock

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